



Michigan Forest Products Council
Business Advocacy for the Forest Products Industry

Testimony on Senate Bill No. 78
12/9/2014

Good morning Mr. Chair and Committee Members and thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony to your Committee. My name is Scott Robbins, I am the Director of the Sustainable Forestry Initiative and Public Affairs for the Michigan Forest Products Council. Today, I would like to offer brief comments regarding Senate Bill 78. We fully support SB 78.

Michigan's forest products industry adds \$12 billion to the state's economy each year and contributes to the employment of more than 150,000 men and women. This industry is a pillar of Michigan's rural economy and is key to diversification of the state's economic activity. Fiber supply is the number one issue for the industry and is its lifeblood.

A steady flow of timber products from Michigan's 3.8 million acres of state timberland is an essential portion of meeting a growing demand for necessary products. Historically, a science-based timber target of 63,000 acres has been part of the Department's timber treatment annual goal. We have always strongly urged the legislature to retain this target as it is vital to the sustainability and growth of our industry.

According to US Forest Service Data, Michigan is one of the leading states in the nation for fiber surplus or growth minus harvest. As a result, fiber supply is biologically available in Michigan. However we have recently observed that forest mortality is beginning to increase and negatively affect our surplus. We would like to applaud the recent efforts of the DNR to address forest health issues and have seen increases in the volumes being sold and acres being treated statewide. These changes have been most welcome and will help in future years as diseases such as oak wilt, beech bark, emerald ash borer, and others continue to expand.

Long-term management and health of the state forest is not enhanced by programs that take productive state timberlands out of production and off limits to recreation opportunities. Our view is that these management ideas are simply quasi wilderness. State wilderness areas should be established by legislation through elected representatives with public input and an open process for debate. This program is being implemented through administrative decisions by the agency. That is not the way to put land into classifications which will likely result in citizens being shut out from multiple uses on state land.

There are hundreds of thousands of acres of state park, river corridors, state wilderness, wildlife preserves and other land classifications where biological diversity can be measured and analyzed. Of the almost 3 million acres of national forest only slightly over half is available for timber harvest. I am old enough to remember how that process went and how so much of the national forest became protected from management. We have seen the consequences of that drastic decision to take productive federal timberland out of active management. Mortality, disease, fire, uncontrolled invasive species and loss of timber types and habitat are the result. Taking productive state forest timberlands for this purpose is counterproductive to what is needed as we pull out from this long economic downturn and turn Michigan's economy around. The state on average, over the past 3 years, produced timber sales of over 800,000 cords annually. A reduction of the acres of productive state timberland could be used in the future as an excuse for not meeting production goals.

SB 78 will not impact the MI DNR's ability to maintain FSC forest certification. If MI DNR certification managers need information or assistance in writing procedures or dealing with auditors we have members who work with the same certification programs on industrial land. Our member land managers would be willing to assist. The DNR and the proponents of this program will assure us that this designation will not affect timber harvest, access, recreation or surrounding private lands. The Living Legacies program is mostly aimed at eliminating human disturbances, such as harvesting timber or oil, gas, or mineral development rather than land use conversion for economic development. For the most part, almost all public lands are already protected from irreversible land use conversion. That represents about 7.6 million acres or roughly 38% of the forestland in the State. We know from experience, that this suggestion of a no net loss approach is very likely not going to be the case. Whenever land is classified into "protected" status we have all seen over the years that the management stops. Soon there are proposals to expand or protect buffers around these island preserves. In a few years a proposal is made to connect the areas with corridors. The campaign to protect an expanding area of the forest from perceived threats goes on and on. For these reasons, we do not support the placement of Biodiversity Stewardship Area's on any productive state timberland and fully support Senate Bill 78.

Thank you for your time today, and I will be happy to answer any questions.

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